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On the Great Meridian

With Frank Reade, Jr., In His New Air-Ship;
OR,
A Twenty-Five Thousand Mile Trip in Mid-Air.

By "NONAME."



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On the Great Meridian With Frank Reade, Jr., in His New Air-Ship;

OR,

A Twenty-Five Thousand Mile Trip in Mid-Air.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "Frank Reade, Jr.'s Greatest Flying Machine," "The Galleon's Gold; or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Deep Sea Search," "For Six Weeks Buried in a Deep Sea Cave," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE "CLOUD CUTTER."

FRANK READE, JR.'s new air-ship the "Cloud Cutter" was completed. The young inventor, famous the world over for his remarkable inventions, was happy.

"Barney and Pomp," he said, to his two right hand men and servitors, "you may prepare to take with me a twenty-five thousand mile trip in mid-air."

"Whurroo!" cried Barney, as he turned a flip-flap, "shure Misther Frank, it's a rale daisy yez are! There's nothin' nearer me heart!"

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp, as he cut a pigeon wing, "I jes' hope dat we start on dat trip berry soon, Marse Frank!"

"Just as soon as we can get the air-ship provisioned," said Frank. "I have already ordered the supplies. They will be put on board to-day."

"Massy Lordy!" cried Pomp, "twenty-five thousan' miles am a berry great ways, Marse Frank!"

"Once around the globe," declared Frank.

"Be jabers, we'll be traveled people whin we get back!"

"You are right, Barney," agreed Frank.

"Shure, sor, over phwat part av the globe we'll be affer traveling?"

"Over North America, Asia, Russia, Europe and the North Atlantic Ocean," replied Frank; "the line we shall follow will be that of the Great Meridian, which passes through Greenwich England."

"Fo' de Lor', Marse Frank! Amn't dat de meridian on which we's bound to reckon our time?"

"Yes," replied Frank; "it is in deference to the wishes of Professor Bulger of Washington that I have decided to take that course. He wishes to make scientific and astronomical observations, and we shall as nearly as possible follow the great meridian around the earth."

"We's bound to hab eberyfing ready, sah," cried Pomp, with another dance. "Jes' yo' be suah ob dat!"

"All right," replied Frank; "see that you do. Now I will go and see how the workmen have finished that cabinet work in the pilot-house."

Frank crossed the yard of the great machine works, which were a legacy from early generations of Reades, and were really the important buildings of the pretty little city of Readestown.

He approached a high roofed building with a great arched door. There was a small side door, which he opened and stepped into the building.

There upon the stocks, or large timbers, rested the famous air-ship.

At first sight one was struck with its feasibility and its beautiful outline. It could be seen at a glance that the question of aerial navigation was solved, and in an exceedingly simple manner.

The Cloud Cutter was a marvelous triumph. To attempt a thorough description of it in detail would be almost impossible.

In structure it was necessarily of the lightest material. The ribs and superstructure were of lightest and toughest wood. The hull was of thinly rolled but bullet proof metal, being an alloy of steel and aluminum.

In shape the air-ship was built upon the lines of an ocean greyhound, with great length and narrow beam.

She carried a long tapering bow, terminating in a sharp ram. Over her deck rose three tall masts of steel, which supported the rotoscope and three large helices, which were the sustaining power of the craft.

Upon the main shaft there was an immense rotoscope, and below it a wide winged helice. The fore and aft shafts each held a helice of great power.

These helices and the rotoscope were driven at immense speed by powerful electric engines, operated by a storage system and dynamos, the secret invention of Frank Reade, Jr.

A huge four-bladed propeller at the stern, drove the air ship ahead with great force.

The engines and all the machinery were operated by means of an electric key board in the pilot-house, which was in the bow of the ship.

The long, smoothly-polished deck was guarded by a rail which extended all the way around the ship.

Three cabins rose above the level of the deck. The forward cabin was devoted to the state-rooms of Barney and Pomp and the electrical stores of the ship.

The main cabin was as richly furnished as any drawing-room. Here were all the necessaries and comforts indispensable to a long voyage through mid air.

The after cabin contained the dining-saloon and the state-rooms for the young inventor and his friends. They were richly furnished.

Below was the galley, and between that and the engine-room was the main hold, where were stored all the provisions and other matter necessary for the trip.

This is a meager description of the new air-ship.

For many weary months Frank Reade, Jr., had studied out the plans and fittings of his new invention. Bit by bit he had gotten all together and perfected a wonderful whole which was the marvel of the world.

And after many disappointments and delays, discouragements and apparent obstacles, he had overcome all and the new air-ship sprung into being.

The young inventor, therefore, may well be pardoned a bit of egotism when he claimed that the question of aerial navigation was effectually solved.

"If I were to betray my secret," he said, "it would revolutionize the world. Our whole, political and social life would undergo a change."

"How do you make that out?" asked a friend.

"It is easy enough to see. The change of affairs would be so complete and radical as to overturn everything in the line of travel now in use!"

"Do you mean it?"

"I do; it is very easy to see. If people could travel in air-ships safely they could very quickly cross the country, and railway trains and steamboats and other modes of travel would become a thing of the past."

"That is logical."

"Of course. The effect upon society could then very readily be seen. It would demand different manners and customs, different styles of living, a revolution in business, and a complete change in our whole social and economic system."

"Then you do not intend to give your discovery to the world?"

"No, sir."

The answer was emphatic.

"Why not?" asked the friend in surprise. "What could be the harm?"

"It would be incalculable. For instance, suppose that the French government obtained first the secret of the air-ship from me? She would of course instantly proceed to pay back her score against Germany. Revenge is sweet. By means of the air-ship she could sail over the Kaiser's dominions and raze every city with dynamite. That would involve Europe and perhaps the whole world in war."

The friend was bound to acknowledge the logic of Frank's theory.

"Consequently," continued the young inventor, "I shall prefer to keep my secret to myself. No foreign government will ever buy it from me."

Preparations were in rapid progress for the trip around the world on the Great Meridian.

One day Frank got a telegram from Washington as follows:

"SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTE,

"FRANK READE, JR.,

"I shall reach Readestown on the 27th inst. with my entire astronomical equipment. I hope that our trip on the Great Meridian will be very productive of valuable data. My best respects to you.

"ANTHONY BULGER,

"Meteorologist."

Progress on the air-ship's equipment had been rapid. But when everything had been got in readiness, as usual a drawback occurred. This was how it came about.

One day a queer looking individual alighted from the cars in Readestown. He did not attract special notice.

He was in stature of medium height, but his features were wild and hawklike with a haggard expression. His eyes were dark and restless.

He was dressed in a queer, outlandish fashion and was beyond all doubt a foreigner.

He hovered about the gate of the machine works for several days, then one afternoon boldly advanced to the gate keeper and sent in his card to Frank Reade, Jr.

The name on the card was:

"MICHEL PAGLIASKI,

MOSCOW, RUSSIA."

Frank studied the bit of cardboard a moment and said:

"Probably he is some agent of the Russian government sent here secretly to buy the air-ship. Of course he must be met like all the rest with a courteous refusal. Show him in!"

A few moments later Michel Pagliaski glided into Frank's private office in a furtive and secret manner.

He looked about him cautiously, as if expecting that every article of furniture might secrete a spy. Then he put a finger to his lips and whispered hoarsely:

"Are we alone? Is it a safe place here?"

Frank in some astonishment regarded the fellow. A sort of suspicion dawned upon him that his visitor was a species of crank.

So he said curtly:

"What do you mean?"

"Do you not understand?" said Pagliaski, "to be overheard would mean ruin."

"Indeed!" said Frank, with some irritation. "Your words are an enigma to me. Please explain them."

Pagliaski bent forward and whispered hoarsely:

"The world is in our grasp. It is in our power to overthrow the fiendish rule of despots and become the saviors of men."

CHAPTER II.

A NARROW ESCAPE.

It needed nothing further to satisfy Frank that the fellow before him was a crank. That he might be a dangerous one he also knew was possible.

For a moment the young inventor was undecided how to act.

His first impulse was to call in Barney or Pomp and have the fellow shown out.

But on second thought he reflected that diplomacy and careful tact would be better in dealing with the madman.

It was easy for him to recognize in Pagliaski a representative of a sect in Russia akin to the socialists who are disposed to plot against the government and will stop at no desperate end to accomplish their purpose.

For a full half minute Frank steadily met the gaze of the crank.

Then he said calmly:

"My friend Pagliaski, you have taken me at my very busiest time. Affairs of the greatest importance claim my time, and—"

The fellow frowned.

"Nothing is of such vast importance as the salvation of men," he cried savagely; "it is a God given duty which we are bound to place before all others! I have come a long ways to make a compromise with you. I tell you humankind must be saved!"

"In what manner do you seek to save them?" asked Frank in a conciliatory tone.

The crank's eyes glittered.

"Now are we at our work," he cried. "You have invented a new air-ship. It was a divine inspiration which led you to invent that. In it you and I will sail the globe over. We will carry great stores of dynamite, and we will raze to the ground—to the common level—every palace, every castle, every stronghold of the despots who hold

the souls of the poor and oppressed between their thumbs. That shall be our sacred task."

Frank was dumfounded.

His first impulse was to peremptorily dismiss the fellow from his presence.

But on second thought he saw that this might lead to serious results. Beyond a doubt Pagliaski would make resistance.

What he might not do could not be estimated. He might carry dynamite bombs in his pockets, for aught the young inventor knew.

So Frank still clung to a conciliatory course, as the best way to deal with the madman.

"So that is your plan," he said, in a smooth way. "Well, my friend, I cannot say that I am ready just at present to co-operate with you. Of course you will give me time."

Pagliaski leaned over the desk and glared at Frank.

"You are not trifling with me?" he gritted.

"Assuredly not!"

"For if you are, it will be a fatal move for you. Michel Pagliaski is in earnest, and will not be foiled!"

"Yet it is only fair for you to give me time for preparation," expostulated Frank.

The crank's eyes lit up.

"Ah, then you accede?" he asked.

"Come here to-morrow at this hour and I will tell you my plans." Pagliaski looked keenly at Frank. It was a trying ordeal, but Frank met his gaze steadily.

The fellow was satisfied.

"It shall be so!" he said, arising. "I will be on hand to-morrow. All must then be in readiness. If it is not, woe unto you!"

He arose and crossed the room. At the door he made a mocking bow and was gone.

The moment the door clanged behind him Frank made action.

He sprung to his feet instantly and touched a bell. Barney leaped into the room.

"Barney!" cried Frank, excitedly, "did you see that man who was just here?"

"That wold lukin' son av a say cook, sor? Shure I reckon he's a Rooshian or a Turk!"

"Yes."

"Well, sor!"

"Go as quickly as you can for officers of the law. Have him locked up at once. He is a madman and not safe to be at large."

Away went Barney on his errand. He succeeded in procuring the madman's arrest.

Pagliaski fought savagely. Word was at once sent to the Russian embassy, from whom it was learned that the fellow had escaped a year before from Russian prisons, and that there was a price on his head.

Pagliaski was put behind the bars, and Frank congratulated himself on his narrow escape. But this was by no means the end of the episode.

Professor Bulger had arrived safely from Washington. The Cloud Cutter was all in readiness.

The departure was to be taken the next morning, and at a late hour in the evening Frank and the professor sat in the private draughting-room discussing some cigars.

Suddenly the door burst open, and in dashed Pomp.

"Golly, Marse Frank, dere am de debbil to pay!"

"What's the matter?" cried the young inventor. "What has happened?"

"Fo' de good Lor' sake, dat dynamiter, sah—he hab escaped from prison jes' an hour ago, an' dey kain't fin' a bit ob him anywhere, sah."

"Jericho!" exclaimed Frank, bounding to his feet. "Has Pagliaski escaped? That is bad! Put guards around all the shops. Lively!"

In an instant all was bustle in the machine works.

Frank felt sure that Pagliaski would visit his vengeance upon him the very first thing he did.

Undoubtedly the fellow had any amount of dynamite hidden away, which he could procure in quick order. In view of all this there was need of expeditious work.

Guards were placed in all parts of the works; but as Frank and the professor were overseeing this a lithe, dark form approached the gate.

"Halt!" cried the guard, who was armed.

But Pagliaski, for he it was with a maniac-like scream, cried:

"I have come for my revenge! Death to the traitor."

Then he hurled some small object at the guard. The latter dodged it, but it struck the wall near him.

Instantly there was an enormous explosion. Part of the wall fell in and the luckless guard was torn in pieces.

With a maniac yell Pagliaski rushed into the yard.

"Look out!" shouted Professor Bulger, "he means to destroy the air-ship."

That this was Pagliaski's purpose was certain. He was rushing straight for Frank Reade, Jr.'s masterpiece.

A bomb was uplifted in his hand. It was a critical moment. But Frank yelled:

"Shoot him!"

But already Barney, who stood near, had drawn his revolver and fired with quick aim.

The dynamiter slipped and fell. A terrible tragedy followed.

The dynamite bomb in his hand in its contact with the ground also

exploded. This exploded the other bombs concealed about Pagliaski's person.

There was an earthquake shock, a volcano of fire and debris. Not a shred of the dynamiter was ever found afterwards.

His fate had been swift, sudden and awful.

Every man in the vicinity was thrown down. Windows were broken, walls were shaken, and other damage done.

The first impulse of all was to look for the air-ship.

It was partly dislodged from its stocks. There was a dent in her aluminum plates, and the pilot house window was smashed.

But otherwise happily she was uninjured.

Mutual congratulations followed that the affair had been no worse. No regrets were felt for the fate of the wretch who had caused the disaster.

The remains of the unfortunate guard were tenderly picked up and some time later turned over to his sorrowing friends.

This was the incident which delayed the departure for two whole days.

In that time the injuries to the air-ship were repaired and all something regained their spirits.

There was certainly reason for congratulation that the affair had been no worse.

Once more the preparations were made for the start.

This time no incident occurred to prevent, and upon a lovely June morning the air-ship rose from the machine shop yard and started on her great cruise around the Great Meridian.

A great crowd had gathered to bid her God-speed, and as she became a speck in the sky all watched her with strange and excited feelings.

She was to accomplish the greatest feat ever attempted by man.

Twenty-five thousand miles in mid-air was certainly a tremendous journey. Frank had however, based all his calculations upon the greatest of nicety.

"We shall make the trip," he said, "but it will be at the expense of the air-ship. She could not sail five thousand miles further, as by that time her machinery will be worn out."

"Yet you might replace it piece by piece as it failed," said Bulger.

"It would hardly be feasible," declared Frank. "The ship itself will be racked and strained by storms and other disasters. This one trip will be the Cloud Cutter's first and last."

"Allow that," said the professor. "Will it not be enough?"

"It will, indeed."

Straight northward the Cloud Cutter sailed.

The Great Meridian made its circumference of the earth between the 50th and 60th degree of north latitude.

Frank intended to intersect the great line at a point upon James Bay in Upper Canada. Thence he intended to sail west over British Columbia to the Pacific.

When the entire circumference of the earth had been accomplished on this line, and the air-ship had again reached James Bay, then would the great trip around the Great Meridian be completed in its wonderful extent.

CHAPTER III.

IN THE INDIAN COUNTRY.

We have introduced the characters of our story, have described the great air-ship and its purposed voyage; also we have seen the voyagers take their leave of Readestown.

Now, with the reader's kind permission, we will transport him to a point in the far Northwest where settlements were unknown—where the foot of white man seldom trod, and where the bear and the moose held undisputed sway.

Here one day the Cloud Cutter hovered about two thousand feet above a great gorge in a mountain chain.

Professor Bulger was on deck with his instruments, and was busily engaged in making observations.

"Steer a little to the northward, Barney!" he cried. "Perhaps a hundred yards. There! The register tells the story. We are exactly on the great meridian!"

"At last!" said Frank, drawing a deep breath.

"Yes, at last."

"Now we propose to keep on this line around the earth."

"Yes. When we reach England we shall pass directly over the great observatory at Greenwich."

"Wonderful! I hope that our trip will be a success!"

"I think it will."

A course was now set due west. Soon the air-ship was hovering over the waters of James Bay.

At this time of the year it was clear of ice, and the sparkling blue expanse made a pretty picture so far below.

The flight across this branch of the Hudson's Bay was quickly made.

When the green forests of the opposite shore came into view a long lagoon was seen to stretch far to the southward.

And from this immense flocks of wild geese and other water fowl arose.

As they did so every one on the air-ship's deck distinctly heard the distant report of a gun.

"What was that?" cried the professor. "Who is firing? I thought this region was unexplored by man."

"Not by the hunters of the Hudson's Bay Company," said Frank.

"There are few wild nooks that they have not explored."

"Oh, of course. This is a part of the great fur country."

"Just so."

"But I am curious to know where that hunter can be. We are now full two thousand feet above the earth."

"That is true," agreed Frank. "I opine that he is over there in that lagoon, and that he is the cause of the flurry among those birds."

"Impossible," said the professor. "That is too far off to hear the report of a rifle."

"Pshaw," replied Frank. "You should know better than that. We are in an elevated atmosphere, and the wind is from that direction. You may be sure our hunter is over there. Ah! did I not tell you?"

The second report of a rifle came plainly to the hearing of all.

Then they heard something else which gave them all a wild thrill. It was a strange hoarse cry of human agony.

The professor gave a start.

"Great Cicero!" he exclaimed, "what on earth was that?"

"It sounded like the cry of some one in distress."

And such it was.

Frank turned to Barney, who was in the pilot-house door.

"Bear down for that lagoon over there, Barney," he said.

"All right, sor," agreed the Celt.

The air-ship was turned in the direction requested. In a short while it hung over the lagoon.

Then a startling scene fell upon the vision of all.

The shores of the lagoon were fringed with dense reeds and dank grasses.

In these there crouched two white men in a canoe. Each carried a rifle, and were apparently in the attitude of listening.

In the open lake, and at the edge of the saw grass, were four large canoes filled with Indians.

The story could be read at a glance.

The white hunters were encroaching upon the hunting reserve of the Indians.

The result was a conflict. The odds were decidedly against the white men.

For some while the aerial voyagers watched the exciting panorama of incidents below.

Somewhat curiously, none of the contesting parties saw the air-ship above them, or attempted to take an upward look.

They were intent wholly upon a game of hide and seek.

The Indians were stealthily paddling along in the verge of the saw-grass, trying to locate their white foe.

The hunters, like Brer Rabbit, were lying low and playing a strategic game.

Suddenly the savages glided closer to the saw-grass. One of them parted the grass.

It was at a point which disclosed the white men to view. The sequel was swift and deadly.

There was a sharp crack, the rifle of one of the hunters spoke. With a yell of mortal agony the savage went over into the water.

"Great Cicero!" gasped the professor, "that is the end of him."

"It looks like it," agreed Frank, "but the hunters have got to hustle now."

This was true.

One of them had seized a paddle and drove the canoe deeper into the saw-grass. But the savages were closing in very rapidly.

It was certain that they meant to capture the white invaders if they could.

Rifle shots now rang out.

The white hunters worked their way deeper into the grass, but yet the savages pursued them.

It was evident that this could not last long.

The redmen would certainly succeed in surrounding their victims. Then the white men's scalps would pay for their temerity.

The aerial voyagers exchanged glances.

"Well," exclaimed the professor, "shall we see them exterminated by those barbarians?"

"Not much," cried Frank, "they are countrymen of ours and it would be indeed inhuman to leave them to such a fate. Bring out your rifles."

"Golly! dat am de way to do it!" cried Pomp, turning a hand-spring.

"Bejabers, we'll thump the loife out av the redskins!" averred Barney.

The rifles were quickly brought and the action began.

The first volley from the air-ship tumbled three of the savages into the water.

The effect upon those below was astonishing. They turned completely dumfounded and gazed upward.

The sight of the air-ship hovering over them was a spectacle which none of them were exactly able to explain or comprehend.

The white men sat stupefied.

The savages with superstitious yells, dove from the canoes and fled ashore. Then they vanished into the forest as if from a spot accursed.

To them doubtless the aerial visitors were evil spirits and had descended to intervene in their attack upon the white men.

There was little danger of the Indians returning. They would forever shut the spot like the plague.

In spite of themselves the aerial voyagers were constrained to laugh.

"Well, I vow!" cried the professor, "that disposed of them in a peremptory manner."

"You are right," agreed Frank, "they think the fiends are after them. Hail the white hunters."

Barney now lowered the air-ship and Frank leaned over the rail.

"Hello, down there!" he shouted.

"Hello!" replied the men.

"Are you wounded, or in need of assistance?"

"Not a bit, stranger," replied one of the men, "but who in tarnation air yew an' whar did yew cum from anyway?"

"This is the air-ship Cloud Cutter from Readestown, U. S. A.," replied Frank, "and I am Frank Reade, Jr., her owner!"

"Yew don't say! An air ship, eh? Wall, that beats ther big beavers! What keeps ye afloat? Is it them big wings up thar?"

"Yes," replied Frank. "You can see them readily."

"Oh, sartin; but what a head yew must hev tew git up sich a thing as that, I'll be durned!"

"Now tell us who you are?" cried Frank.

"We are two Hudson's Bay men. We cum over hyar to bag some otter an' ran into a gang of reds."

"Well," said Frank, "you were having a lively time with them."

"Yew bet! Only for yew we should have lost our ha'r. Much obleeged to ye. Won't ye cum down? We kain't do much fer ye but give ye a fine otter pelt we've got hyar."

"Thank you," replied Frank, "if you are able to get back to your camp all right, I don't believe we will stop."

"Oh, fer sartin! Don't yew fret about us! Them Injuns never'll git us boxed up like that agin fer one while. But I say, friend!"

"Well?"

"Whar be yew going with that air-ship?"

"No doubt you will be surprised," said Frank, with a laugh, "but we are going around the world."

"Around the world?"

"Yes."

"Yew don't mean it! That's a heap of a long ways!"

"Twenty-five thousand miles."

"Sho! How long will you be about it?"

"About two months we reckon."

"Wall, we wish yew good luck. May yew git thar with ther best of luck!"

"Thank you. Good-bye."

"Bye ter yer, straingers."

The last seen of the trappers they were yet standing in the saw grass watching the air-ship. This little episode was not long in being followed by yet another.

CHAPTER IV.

EXPERIENCE WITH GRIZZLIES.

BEYOND St. James Bay there stretched an immeasurable waste of forest and barren mountains.

These were intersected with wild and rocky passes.

They were as deep and frightful as any depicted in Dante's Inferno, and the aerial voyagers gazed down into them with awe.

As they were sailing over one rocky spur of the mountain, Barney espied a startling object far below.

"Mither av Moses!" he cried, "wud yez luk at the loikes av this, Mistrer Frank?"

In an instant every one was at the rail.

The cause of Barney's exclamation was at once seen. It was a monster specimen of a grizzly bear, perched upon a ledge of rock, and rending the carcass of a mountain goat.

"A grizzly!" cried the professor.

"That is so!" exclaimed Frank.

"What a monster!"

"The largest I ever saw!"

The voyagers gazed down upon the wild scene with much interest.

"Golly!" said Pomp, "I done think his skin would jes' make a fine rug fo' de main cabin."

"You are right, Pomp!" cried Frank. "It would be a great curiosity, properly dressed."

"Is it not possible to secure the pelt?" asked the professor. "Why not, Frank?"

"It shall be done!" cried the young inventor. "Bring out my heavy rifle, Pomp. Hold the ship steady, Barney, and lower a trifle."

These orders were obeyed.

The air-ship descended a few hundred feet, and Frank took careful aim at the bear.

The rifle which he used carried a very heavy ball.

His purpose was to aim for the base of the bear's brain, which he could do with a fair chance of success at that angle.

Crack!

The rifle spoke sharply. The bullet went true to its mark.

Bruin reared aloft a moment pawing the air. Then he fell in a heap over the carcass of his victim.

The aerial voyagers applauded Frank's shot.

"That was a beauty!" cried the professor. "Now to get the skin."

Down settled the air-ship. A few feet from the ledge a rope ladder was thrown out.

Down this Frank and Barney slid. The other two were to remain and guard the ship.

Barney had keen knives with him to flay the carcass. He at once began work.

The air-ship not having an anchor out drifted some few hundred yards away. This left Frank and Barney alone on the ledge.

Both had committed a great oversight which they did not realize until now.

They had in their haste left their rifles behind and had brought no weapons but knives. This had been a natural oversight as neither had expected to meet any other danger, as no other foe was in sight.

But just as Barney inserted the knife into the bear's carcass a thrilling incident occurred.

Without warning from beneath a cavity in the ledge an immense black form trundled forth.

"Heavens!" gasped Frank, as he reeled back.

"Tare an' ounds! Mither Mary save us!" ejaculated Barney.

It was a second grizzly, if anything larger than the first. Words cannot describe the situation.

The two men were facing an awful peril.

The bear was between them and the higher ledge. Back of them there was no retreat save over a precipice.

One instant the grizzly sniffed the air and glared at his white foes.

The fealty of a grizzly for its mate is most intense. The scent of the blood taught the brute that harm had befallen its companion.

Its fury was therefore beyond description. It emitted a hoarse roar and then made a side-long lunge toward Barney.

"Luk out, Mistrer Frank!" cried the Celt. "Shure he's afer us! Divil take ye!"

The Irishman attempted to dodge, but the bear was too quick. He was upon the Celt instantly.

Barney did not hesitate to meet the pass as a brave man should. He plunged his knife to the hilt in the bear's side.

Frank saw the peril of his colleague and rushed to his assistance. He picked up a huge fagot and thrust it into bear's throat, thus preventing the brute from crushing Barney's arm in its jaws.

Then the battle began.

There was no way but to ply the knives. Again and again they went to the hilt.

But yet it seemed as if no vital part could be reached. The bear now had them both in its embrace.

Its claws were rending their flesh and tearing their clothing from them. The situation was a most critical one.

The air-ship was rapidly drawing down to the rescue.

But before it could reach the contestants a startling event occurred. The bear made a fierce lunge, all lost their balance and over the precipice they went.

It was full a hundred feet to a deep, dark pool below. The three hurtling forms went into this with a terrific splash.

"Golly, Massy Lordy! sabe us all!" screamed Pomp, "dey am done to' now, Marse Bulger."

"Never say that!" cried the professor, excitedly, "lower the air-ship. They must be saved!"

Down went the air-ship into the depths.

Three struggling forms were on the surface of the pool. As fortune had it, that tumble over the precipice was the salvation of Barney and Frank.

It released them from the embrace of the bear.

To be sure the fall was a severe one, but they had suffered no very great injury.

They were floundering in the black waters of the pool, trying to escape the savage pursuit of the bear.

The latter had not in the least abated its purpose to capture the white foe. It swam about, fiercely snapping and clawing.

But each time Frank or Barney would dive, at the same time trying to reach the ledge where they could scramble out and escape.

How long this sort of thing might have continued it was not easy to say. The prompt action of Pomp and the professor saved the day.

The air-ship settled down rapidly over the basin, and the professor threw a rope ladder down into the water.

It fell into Barney's grasp.

"Here, Mistrer Frank!" he cried. "Catch on quick, sor! Shure, we'll give the ould brute the slip!"

Frank made a lunge for the ladder. He clutched the lower round. Barney was above him.

"Up, up, Pomp," shouted the professor.

The bear was headed for Frank and would have reached him in another moment. There was no time to lose.

Up went the air-ship and Frank was snatched upward just in time to escape the bear's claws.

Up the rope ladder Barney went, and Frank followed him.

A moment later they were on board the air-ship. Their lives were saved.

It was a happy moment for all; for a brief time things had indeed looked dubious.

But all was right now and the air-ship sailed back to the ledge; the grizzly in the pool below crawled slowly out and sank exhausted. Her wounds were beginning to tell.

Barney now quickly finished removing the skin of the dead grizzly and then returned aboard the Cloud Cutter.

No time was lost in once more getting under way. There was no desire to remain longer in that spot.

The Cloud Cutter went on her way once more to the westward. For days she held that course.

The rest of the trip across British Columbia was uneventful.

No descent was made and the Cloud Cutter made rapid progress. The Pacific Ocean rapidly drew near.

"We shall skirt the lower edge of the Aleutians," said Frank, "that will be a chance for us to see the seals and the island natives."

"I shall enjoy a seal hunt," cried the professor.

"Begorra, count me in, sor!" shouted Barney.

Pomp chimed in to the same effect. A day or two later the horizon cleared and the ocean line was seen.

The voyagers much impressed all gathered upon the deck and gazed upon the wonderful Pacific, which washed the western shores of the American countries.

It was a wonderful ocean and held much of mystery and charm. The air-ship was to pass directly across its northern part.

"We are but a few hundred miles above Vancouver Island," said Frank, "beyond the horizon line out there you will find an island which is called Queen Charlotte's Island."

"That is correct," cried Bulger. "And if I mistake not, there are natives upon that isle."

"Do you wish to stop there?"

"I think not. I am anxious to go on to the Aleutians. There we shall find much of interest."

"Very well," said Frank. "We will then say good-bye to the American Continent."

The air ship stood out across the sound to Queen Charlotte's Island. This was passed later in the day.

Then the air ship passed out to sea.

America was left behind. Foreign lands lay before them, where thrilling adventures were in store.

With varied emotions they watched the great northwest territory fade from view.

Then they turned their faces oceanward, and looked for what the future would bring them out of the Western World.

CHAPTER V.

THE PLAGUE SHIP.

"OONALASHKA will be the first of the Aleutians we shall come across," said Frank; "it is beyond the extremity of the Alaska Peninsula."

"And then we will enter the Behring Sea," said Bulger.

"Yes, and thence to Kamtschatka, the border land of Asia. Beyond that peninsula is the sea of Okhotsk."

It was a charming sail over the limpid waters of the peaceful ocean. A few vessels were sighted.

But it was not until they were nearing Oonalashka that Frank made out a schooner on their lee which flew a flag of distress.

"What can be the matter?" asked the young inventor, "it does not look like a wreck."

"Not at all," said Bulger; "she stands up well in the breeze."

There was some hesitation. Then Frank said:

"Well, it would not be a Christian spirit to refuse to aid a distressed vessel. So here goes."

The air-ship held down for the vessel.

As they drew nearer it was seen that she flew the flag of Russia. Not a soul was on her decks.

Even the wheel was deserted, being lashed to the wind. Her sails flapped idly in the listless breeze.

"Why, what sort of a craft is she?" asked the professor in surprise. "What has become of her crew? Have they mutinied and deserted, or have they been washed overboard?"

"We'll soon find out," said Frank.

The air-ship sailed down to within speaking distance of the Olga, which was the name of the ship.

Then she was hailed.

For a time no reply came.

Then Barney declared that he heard a voice in the cabin shouting in reply.

"That settles it!" cried Frank. "My curiosity is sufficiently strong to find out what that means. Throw out the rope ladder, Barney."

This was done and Frank and Pomp slid down to the shrouds of the Olga. Thence they descended to the deck.

Plainly now a voice could be heard in the cabin soliciting aid. But it was not in the American tongue. The utterances were almost unintelligible.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" said Pomp, "dar am someting wrong down dere. Shuah's yo' bo'n."

"That's right," agreed Frank, "but we'll find out."

With which he sprang down the little cabin stairs. There at the foot of the stairs reclined the figure of a man.

His face was upturned, and at sight of it Frank paused, while a terrible chill seized his heart.

"My God!" he gasped.

The features were livid and awfully swollen. Great pustules were thickly spread over it.

Pomp halted, and with a gasp of terror retreated to the head of the gangway.

"Golly, Marse Frank. Cum out ob dat, fo' de lub of de Lor'!"

"Smallpox!" exclaimed the young inventor, in barely audible tones. "How horrible, my soul, how horrible!"

The stench from the cabin was terrible. That others dead or dying were there confined there was no doubt.

The unlucky ship had been smitten with the awful plague and it was certain that its crew would be if they were not already wiped out.

The poor wretch at the foot of the stairs regarded Frank piteously.

He spoke in hurried interjections, but Frank was not very familiar with the Russian tongue. He ventured to reply in French.

To his surprise the fellow answered him.

"For the love of the saints, monsieur, give me help!" pleaded the suffering wretch. "I am stricken with the awful plague, but I may be saved. Do not turn from me!"

Frank braced himself.

"No," he said, resolutely, "I will not turn from you. I will help you all in my power. Have you companions?"

"All dead, monsieur," replied the fellow, "no help can be given them. I am Demetri Nikolai the captain of this vessel. Twelve months ago we sailed from the Baltic. This cursed disease came upon us not four weeks ago. One by one our crew was decimated and we flung them overboard. Two are dead below now. I had not the strength to bury them. Ah, God, how my fever runs. I shall die, if I do not have help. I shall die."

The wretch arose partly to his feet and sank back. Frank was in a fearful quandary.

His sense of charity forbade his turning from the dying man; yet it was plain to him that he could not be saved.

And would he not carry back the infection to the air-ship with the awful certainty of communicating it to the others?

What was to be done?

The poor victim lay groaning upon the cabin floor. Frank hesitated no longer.

"Go back to the air-ship, Pomp," he said. "Bring me medicines as Bulger will give them to you."

"A'right, Marse Frank!"

Away went Pomp. Frank went boldly down the stairs and bent down over the suffering man.

As he did so he saw that a great change had come over him. His face had swollen frightfully, and his tongue protruded. His breath came in gasps.

It needed not more to tell Frank the truth.

"Too late!" he muttered. "He is sure to die!"

It was true.

The captain of the Olga was drawing his last breath. Before Pomp returned he gasped his last.

Frank at once proceeded to administer liberal disinfectants to himself and Pomp.

Also he scattered it through the cabin. Two more of the crew lay dead there.

The Olga was a fine ship, and it seemed a pity that such a curse had fallen upon her.

What was to be done?

Should they leave her to the will of the wind and waves? This would only make her a derelict to the peril of other vessels.

Yet Frank could not see any way to take her into a port. He thought some of taking her to the nearest of the Aleutians.

But while he was thus debating the matter he heard a call from above.

He rushed upon deck and saw that Bulger was at the air-ship's rail calling him.

"Yonder is a Russian war vessel, Frank!" shouted the professor.

"Shall we not signal her?"

"A Russian vessel!" cried Frank, eagerly seeing his way out of the difficulty at once. "Certainly! Call her up at once—we will turn the Olga over to her."

The signal was made, and the Russian vessel bore down to the spot.

A boat was put out and brought her lieutenant to the Olga's deck.

The Russians were regarding the air-ship with wonderment.

When the lieutenant stepped on deck Frank quickly explained the situation to him in French.

"Mon Dieu!" gasped the officer, retreating to the gangway. "The contagion, monsieur—the contagion!"

"Nonsense!" cried Frank sharply. "That is cowardice! Proper disinfectants will prevent that. Something must be done with this vessel—it belongs to your country."

Petrovski, the lieutenant of the Great Bear, saluted and replied:

"Right, Mousieur American. I do not forget my duty. I will send for our surgeons. They will disinfect the vessel and bury the dead."

"Then I am relieved from further responsibility and will turn the Olga over to you?" asked Frank.

"Oui, monsieur!"

"That settles it," said the young inventor. "Let us go back to the air ship, Pomp."

Back up the rope ladder to the deck of the Cloud Cutter they went, while the Russians watched them wonderingly.

There was no doubt but that the Olga finally reached port safely in the charge of the Russian warship.

The air ship went on its way. All the voyagers disinfected themselves liberally.

"No danger at all of taking the infection," said Bulger, confidently. "I will give you a wash which will fix you all right, also an inward dose which will kill the germs of any disease on this earth."

Whether the professor's medicine accomplished this end or not, it is not possible to state, but certainly none in the party became infected.

The fate of the Olga's crew comprised a somewhat sad incident, and had a more or less depressing effect upon our friends for the balance of the day.

But the next day Oonalashka was reached. The long chain of the Aleutians came in sequence.

When the last of these islands were passed over a great sea lay extended to view.

Beyond this was the great country of Asia.

The trip of the air-ship had now been well entered upon. The native land of the voyagers was left behind them.

And they began to look forward to the scenes and incidents to come with much anticipation.

"We shall strike the lower part of the peninsula of Kamtschatka," said Frank. "The capital, I believe, is the city of Petrapavlansk. We shall leave that to the north."

"Then we will not visit the capital," said Bulger.

"The people of Kamtschatka are a peculiar class," said Frank. "They are a cross between the Mongolian and the Russian Tartars. I don't believe we had better take many chances in descending among such."

"You are right," agreed Bulger, "the laws of their country might not be friendly toward us!"

"Very true, and if the air-ship was confiscated, or we were imprisoned our trip around the Great Meridian would be seriously interfered with."

"I believe you!"

"So we will not stop at any large town in Kamtschatka. But we will sail near enough to the earth to get a good look at the people. With that we must rest content."

CHAPTER VI.

ACROSS THE OKHOTSK SEA.

THE sail across the Kamtschatka Sea was quickly made. The next day the coast of the Asiatic country burst into view.

They were now entering upon a new world, totally unlike that which they had just left.

Most of the people of Kamtschatka wear furs winter and summer alike; they populated the coast quite densely, and as seen from the deck of the air-ship, were a very curious people.

Wherever the air-ship was seen by them, a sensation was created.

In the hamlets, people were apparently stricken with alarm.

They left their labor in forest or field and fled into their dwellings. In one place where there was a little fort, a cannon was fired at the Cloud Cutter.

But the shot did not reach the air-ship, so no harm was done.

As this was the narrowest point of the peninsula, it did not take long to cross it.

Finally the Sea of Okhotsk burst into view. When first seen its waters were smooth and mirror like.

Vessels lay with idly flapping sails, and the voyagers might have imagined that this was the Mediterranean that they were looking at, had it not been for a certain sting in the air.

But far in the southeast there was a bank of clouds, while a haze obscured the horizon.

"I tell you we are going to have a storm," said Frank. "I am not sure but that we had better not attempt to cross until after it is over."

The professor looked dubious.

"Is it not risky to land?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Then I say for one, let us push on. If the storm comes we can go above it, I think."

"All right," said Frank. "We will take the chances."

So the Cloud Cutter was launched out over the Sea of Okhotsk. This was doubly risky owing to the fact that night was close at hand. The Cloud Cutter soon left the Peninsula of Kamtschatka far out of sight. Only the boundless waste of the sea once more lay beneath.

Darkness shut down very rapidly now.

With it came a soughing wind which fluttered through the paddles of the rotoscope and swayed the ship.

All the voyagers were on deck. The search-light sent a great pathway of radiance far across the darkened waters.

Occasionally a vessel crossed this path. But they were always seen with scant sail and laying before the wind.

It was evident that the mariners scented and were prepared as well for the storm.

The breeze was chill and all wore thick storm coats. The professor had even donned furs.

"I shall be glad to reach Asia," he said. "I think we will find it warmer in Manchuria."

"There is cold in the north of Manchuria, to be sure," said Frank; "in fact, the great meridian follows a cold belt around the world."

"That is a fact."

Barney and Pomp had gone below.

The darky had some bread to put in the oven, and the Celt pretended that he had some machinery to oil.

If there was one thing the two loved it was to play practical jokes upon each other.

A clever trick, a rough and tumble scuffle, or sharp badinage of words just suited them.

It mattered not what Frank Reade, Jr., would say, they would have their little scraps just the same.

Thus far their time had been so occupied that neither had found time for a racket.

But now the ship was sailing easy, with her course regulated by the rudder being lashed, and there was nothing much to do.

The moment Pomp reached the galley he heard shuffling footsteps behind him. He turned instantly to see that Barney was crouched behind him.

The light of mischief in the Celt's eyes told the darky instantly that he meant to play some prank upon him. Instantly Pomp braced up.

"Hi da, yo' fish loafah!" he sputtered, "tink you'se a heap smaht, don' yo'. Well, yo' kain't come no chicken trap ober dis coon, an' yo' kin bet on it."

"Begorra, it's desavin' yesilf ye may be," averred Barney, innocently. "Shure, I was just cumin' in fer to see if yez didn't have a stray piece av pie around."

Pomp sniffed the air.

"Ain' got no pie fo' I'shmen," he declared, stiffly.

"Phwat's that yez say? Do yez mean to insinuate, yez black ape, that an' Irishman ain't as good as any other man?"

"Hain't got nuffin' to say, sah. 'Sperience is my teachah."

"Begorra, it niver larned yez dacint manners."

"But it jes' opened mah eye, honey, all de same."

"Bejabers, that's right, an' fer half a cent I'd close it fer yez," and Barney spat on his hands.

"Huh!" sniffed Pomp; "yo' ain' so berry smaht as yo' finks yo' is. G'long up to yo' own engine room an' leabe de cook alone, or fo' de Lor' I make yo' into dough lak I would a scoop ob flour. Take mah word fo' it, honey."

This was enough for Barney. What better challenge could he have or hope for?

"Do yez mane that, naygur?" he asked, sharply.

"Y' bet I do!"

Whish! Bif! Bang!

Barney snatched up a canvas bound rasher of bacon and gave Pomp the benefit of it.

It carromed off the darky's cranium, and struck the flour scoop on the shelf above.

The transformation was startling.

Down came the scoop with its contents. It changed Pomp from a black man into a pale face quicker than one could say Jack Robin-son.

There crouched the darky completely covered with flour. It sifted through his wool down the back of his neck, percolated into his ears, and drifted up his nostrils.

Barney lay back with mouth wide open, roaring with laughter.

Pomp spluttered and gagged.

"Whew—whist, Massy Lordy—gib me a chainte—I fix yo'!"

Then the coon picked up the huge pile of dough on the shelf. Barney's mouth was stretched open like the mouth of a cavern.

Swish—splutter—splash!

Straight and full into the Celt's yawning bread trap went the sticky mass of dough.

It completely blocked up that thoroughfare, and sent the Celt over upon his back, gasping and gurgling and strangling.

"Fo' de good Lor'," roared Pomp, who now had his innings, "I'se squar' wif yo' dis time, I'sh! Ha, ha! Hi, hi, ho!"

It was all the Celt could do to get the sticky mass out of his clinging jaws.

Then the expletives which burst forth were hardly choice or well considered.

"Belabers—I'll—(splutter)—have the loife av yez—(kerchew) fer that, yez misfit nigger. Whurroo! the blood av the O'Sheas is up. Shure me kindred air calling from their ould toime castles fer revinge. Luk out fer yersilf, naygur!"

And straight for the coon Barney made a rush.

They closed in a terrific rough and tumble wrestle. It seemed as if they were bound to break everything in the place and their own backs as well when Frank's voice came down the cabin stairs.

"Barney and Pomp! On deck lively! The storm has come!"

In a moment the two jokers were on their feet as sober as clocks. They hastily pulled themselves together.

"The Shorm!" gasped Barney, "bad cess to it. Shure I'm afraid it will do us harrum!"

"Golly! I'so jes' gwine to fink de same, I'sh."

So up the stairs they went quickly to the deck.

A distant vivid lightning bolt shot across the sky. Frank was at the barometer.

"We're going to have a hard one!" he cried. "Stand by all! Close every door and window! Barney, go into the engine room! Pomp, come with me into the pilot house! Professor, you can come also if you wish!"

"I believe I will," agreed the scientist; "I can study the phenomena from there the best of any place."

"I believe you can."

These arrangements had hardly been made when the storm burst.

For a moment it seemed as if a million howling demons were about the air-ship.

A perfect pandemonium reigned.

Then rain fell in torrents.

While this lasted the air-ship rode steady, but Frank knew that as soon as the cloud passed they would get the storm.

And this came true.

The rain cloud quickly passed and the air-ship was at the mercy of the awful winds.

For a time it seemed as if the frail vessel could not live. Frank clung to the wheel as long as she obeyed her rudder.

But there came a time when the terrific force of the gale forbade this. Then she was picked up and tossed and pitched like a toy at the mercy of a giant.

Round and round she spun like a top.

"Heaven help us!" cried the professor. "Cau we hope to outride this, Frank?"

"Keep cool!" cried the young inventor, "it cannot last!"

"If it does we are certainly lost!"

"Never give up," replied Frank.

For a moment there came a lull. It seemed as if the first onslaught of the gale was spent.

The air-ship came to her head and rode level and steady. Then Frank brought her up closer to the wind.

But the respite was brief.

The next moment it seemed as if a thunderbolt had struck the ship.

She went almost instantly over upon her beam ends, and not one on board but expected death was at hand.

CHAPTER VII.

THE BRIGANDS.

EVERYONE in the party was thrown violently over and knocked half senseless.

What followed was like a terrible mixed up dream to the voyagers.

It seemed as if they were being hurled and whirled, they knew not whither and there was no power to prevent, neither could they regain even a momentary equilibrium.

Frank regretted in that instant his attempt to outride the storm.

He saw that it would have been much wiser and safer to have mounted into a higher altitude above the tempest.

If he could have reached the key board at that moment, he would have quickly sent the air-ship up. But he was unable to do so.

"My soul!" he gasped in horror, "we are lost. I fear the worst."

Every instant he expected to feel the air-ship dashed into the sea. But this did not happen. A lucky accident occurred to prevent.

As good fortune had it, the wrenching of the air-ship threw open the rotoscope lever to its fullest width; the result was that the air-ship shot upward.

Up it went like a rocket. Up and up, whirling and tossing, buffeted and hurled, but yet up.

Soon the terrible motion began to abate.

The Cloud Cutter once more rode on an even keel. The machinery was buzzing frightfully.

Frank regained his feet half stunned and reached the pilot-house window.

The search-light sent a glare into the depths below. This revealed the fact that they had risen above the storm.

"Is—is it over?" gasped the professor, as bruised and exhausted he regained his feet.

"Yes!" replied Frank.

"Thank Heaven!"

"At least we are out of the storm!"

"Where are we now?"

"Well on our way to Heaven if the machinery is not checked soon," said Frank. "Turn off the main dynamo, Barney."

"All right, sor," came back a rueful voice from the engine room. "Shure, I've nigh broke me head fer it."

The upward ascent of the air-ship was checked, however.

She hung in mid air far above the clouds. Overhead the stars twinkled brightly in the azure dome.

The thunder and roar of the storm came up plainly from below.

The voyagers now realized what a narrow escape they had.

"On my word," cried the professor, "I wouldn't go through that experience again for anything!"

"It was a rocky one," agreed Frank, "but we are out of it all right, and we must congratulate ourselves."

"We certainly have reason to. But what will the move be now?"

"All we can do is to wait for the storm to pass."

"Exactly!"

"In daylight we can tell much more clearly what to do. That is certainly beyond dispute."

"Do you think the ship is badly injured?"

"I hope not. We of course can tell little about it just now."

"What makes it so cold?" cried the professor, blowing his fingers.

"Golly! I se nigh froze up!" averred Pomp, dancing a jig.

"It is the altitude," said Frank.

"Why, certainly," agreed Bulger. "Why did I not think of that? Only see, the windows are already covering with thick frost."

"We will do well to keep inside where it is warm," said Frank.

There was an electric heating device on board the air-ship. This was called into requisition.

The result was that the cabin was soon as warm as one could desire.

As the danger was now over, and things were once more comfortable on board the air-ship, the question of sleep was brought up.

As it was past midnight the necessity of at once turning in was apparent.

Barney offered to stand on guard until daylight, so the others turned in. When day came at last the storm had passed, and the Cloud-Cutter descended to a more comfortable level.

So far as could be ascertained no harm had occurred to the ship, beyond a straining of her hull and the slight springing of the rotoscope shaft.

But Frank was decided upon one point.

He would never risk another storm. It was better always to be on the safe side.

This was the only serious incident which befell the travelers upon their voyage across the Sea of Okhotsk.

The first land sighted brought all on deck.

"The Island of Saghalien," declared Bulger, "beyond it is the Gulf of Tartary where so many Japanese pirates have strongholds, and beyond that is Amour, a province of western Asia."

"Then we shall sojourn with the Tartars and Upper Mongolians for a long while?" said Frank.

"Yes."

"Well, I am not anxious to make their close acquaintance. If we do not descend, we need apprehend no trouble from them."

"Exactly! There is no very good reason why we should descend."

"None, whatever. Our purpose is to accomplish the circumference of the earth upon the Great Meridian?"

"Just so!"

The coast of the Saghalien Island was a wild and inhospitable one. The time occupied in crossing the island was not great.

The narrow body of water known as the Gulf of Tartary was beyond. Across this the air ship sailed.

There were numbers of lateen-sailed craft seen upon the sea below, and Bulger declared:

"No doubt they are Japanese pirates. This is a favorite rendezvous for them."

But when the coast of the Continent of Western Asia really burst into view then our travelers were vastly interested.

The coast was strewn with little quaint fishing ports and hamlets. Curious Tartar craft sailed the sea.

The air-ship sailed over the high cliffs inland.

The country spread to view was not of the most fertile or yet the most barren.

There were grain fields and many signs of profitable agriculture. But the cities were walled, and armed bands of men were common.

Like any barbarous country it was plainly accursed with petty warfare and brigandage.

For a whole day the air-ship sailed over Amour.

There was much to watch in the quaint villages and the odd costumes of the people.

Professor Bulger profited by this. He satisfied his mind upon many points which had hitherto been knotty problems.

The great range of Joblanno mountains were visible far to the North.

A spur of these were to be crossed by the air-ship. Their high summits and deep, dark passes marked the real boundary line into Manchuria.

Thus far no incident of a thrilling sort had occurred.

"I declare," exclaimed the professor, "don't those mountains look like the resort of thieves and brigands?"

"I'll wager they are such," declared Frank.

"I would not be a bit surprised. Nature certainly designed them for just such a purpose."

"One might expect to see Ali Baba and his Forty Thieves appear."

"Just so!"

The air-ship hung over a deep and rock pass, when the professor caught sight of a curious scene below.

Laboring up a steep and narrow highway was a train of people. In the lead was a very curious looking vehicle drawn by Barbary horses.

In the vehicle there reclined upon silk cushions a very beautiful young lady, evidently a Russian of noble birth.

"Heigho!" cried the professor; "here is a scene from a fairy tale. The princess and her retinue. Where now is the gay young lover?"

Instantly the others crowded to the rail and regarded the scene with interest.

"She is certainly a person of distinction," said Frank; "there is no doubt of that."

The droshky, or whatever sort of vehicle it might be, was a good load for the four Barbary ponies.

They tugged and panted up the steep grade until they reached the brow of the cresent.

Then the driver, like a merciful man, brought them to a halt.

It was at this point that Bulger suddenly clutched Frank's arm and cried:

"Mercy on us! Do you see that?"

"What?" asked Frank in a tone of surprise.

Then he held his breath with sudden interest as he beheld the scene which had claimed Bulger's attention.

From a section of the mountain pass, a troop of armed Mongolians with their curious yellow costumes suddenly rode forth.

They instantly surrounded the traveling party, with threatening gestures and brandished swords.

"They are brigands!" cried the professor. "I tell you, Frank, they mean to assassinate the party!"

"Easy!" said Frank, coolly, "there is no doubt but what they are brigands, but they shall not harm that traveling party if I can help it."

"Good!" cried the professor, eagerly. "You mean to go to their rescue?"

"I do!"

Barney sprang into the pilot-house and checked the speed of the air-ship.

Then he allowed it to drop quickly until it was but a few hundred feet above the contestants.

A most stirring scene was there being enacted.

CHAPTER VIII.

BROUGHT TO EARTH.

ALREADY the brigands and the soldiers of the Tartar princess' train were crossing swords. That the latter were half hearted in their defense, however, was very certain.

The certainty of their defeat and the hope of amnesty was doubtless responsible for this. In fact it was not improbable but that some of them might be in league with the robbers.

The princess herself seemed distraught. She was shouting excited and hysterical commands to her followers.

Up to this moment none in either party had perceived the air-ship above them.

Now, however, Frank placed a small trumpet to his lips, and gave a quick, harsh note.

Instantly those below looked up in amazement. The result was not easy to depict.

The appearance of such a spectacle in mid air over their heads was such as might well have aroused every superstitious element in their ignorant minds.

For a moment the Princess and her men gazed spell-bound.

The attacking brigands reined back their Barb's in sheer amazement which merged into terror.

The great ship swooping down upon them through the air was a spectacle which they could not understand.

Had it been upon the surface, they would have feared little. But floating in the air—what but supernatural means could account for that?

Frank kept the Cloud-Cutter hovering above them, while he rang the changes upon the horn.

The brigands stood their ground but a few moments longer. Then they gave rein to their horses.

In every direction through the hills they fled.

It would have been folly to have attempted to catch them.

Nor did Frank venture it. He had gained his end which was to save the Tartar Princess' train, and that was enough.

However, he sent down a hail in French to the natives below. To his surprise it was answered.

"What manner of beings are you, who can float in the air?" came the query.

"We are Americans!" replied Frank.

"Americans! Ah, wonderful! Mon Dieu! but yours are the greatest people in the world! Nothing is impossible to you, even to sailing in the air!"

"That is right," Frank replied; "but how did you, a Tartar, learn to speak French so well?"

"Pardon, monsieur, I am no Tartar, but as good a Frenchman as ever trod the Jardin Mabille or the Rue de St. Honore!"

"You are a Frenchman?"

"Oui!"

"How—what are you doing in this out of the way part of the world?"

"Ah, monsieur, I am a fugitive from my native soil—under the ban of a crime falsely charged to me. I was never guilty of it. But I am doomed to exile in this unknown part of the earth."

"That is hard luck. What is your name?"

"I am Pierre Vontaine of Paris. Here, I am Uhla, the captain of the guard of the Princess Trikona. You have saved her life, monsieur. We were attacked by the treacherous Kasmono, who had sworn to carry her to Mongolia as his bride."

"Indeed!" cried Frank, "convey my compliments to the princess and tell her I am glad to have been able to serve her!"

"I will do so, monsieur."

A consultation was held between the captain of the guard and the princess.

The result was that Trikona waved her silken serape gracefully to Frank, who gallantly responded by a low bow.

Then the princess and her train went on, while the air-ship went back to its higher altitude.

Across the spur of the Joblano the Cloud-Cutter made its way.

They were now in Manchuria the land of the Tartars and the Mongols. It was a wild and picturesque land.

Two days sailing sufficed to cross it, however.

No event worthy of note occurred. Then the party came to the Province of Irkoutsk.

For some days the air-ship sailed over this province which was really under Russian regime. It was thickly settled.

Towns, cities, and hamlets were scattered everywhere.

There were extensive mines, great agricultural fields, and evidences of industry and a semi-civilization which augured well for the future of Irkoutsk.

"Well," said the professor, after some study, "this is about the best part of Asia we have come to yet."

"Indeed it is," agreed Frank, "and that is not saying much."

They laughed at this and turned away from the rail. Just as they did so a distant boom was heard and there was a shock.

The air ship reeled and shook from stem to stern. The machinery buzzed, and the Cloud Cutter began to sink.

"What has happened?" cried Bulger, wildly. "We are sinking."

"Golly, Marse frank, we'se gwine to de debbil now!" cried Pomp, in wildest dismay.

"Bejabers, we'll fall into the hands av the spalpeens!" cried Barney, "bad cess to them!"

Frank was at the rail instantly.

A glance was enough.

He saw far below, in a small valley, a little mining town. It was of the size of an American village, containing five or six thousand inhabitants.

In the mountain side were deep mining shafts.

Here the exiles and slaves worked, digging coal and iron from the depths of the earth.

There was a small fort on the hill-side. That it was garrisoned was plain to be seen.

And certain members of this garrison had conceived the dastardly plan of bringing the air ship down to the earth.

For this purpose they had loaded and sighted a small cannon. The shot was nigh spent when it reached the Cloud Cutter.

But it yet had sufficient force to dent the ship's plates and throw the cog gearing of the rotoscope out of shape.

This of course caused the air-ship to sink.

It was descending rapidly.

The soldiers in the battery thought they had done a big thing and cheered wildly.

But Frank set his lips firmly and muttered:

"I'll give them all the fun they want before they get through."

A quick examination showed that the cogs could not be repaired at a moment's notice.

It would be necessary to take the ship to the earth anyway. But Frank knew that it was descending among its arrant foes.

The situation was certainly not one to be contemplated with equanimity.

Down sank the air-ship. The voyagers had armed themselves and were stationed in the pilot house ready for deadly battle.

A large body of the Tartar soldiers were under the air-ship and instantly seized its rail as it touched the earth.

In a jiffy they began to pour over the rail.

They were a lawless and barborous set, and Frank saw at once that it was useless to temporize with them.

Their apparent purpose was to at once overwhelm the defenders of the air-ship. Frank saw at once what the result would be.

The laws of the land would no doubt permit them to confiscate the air-ship. The great trip around the earth would be terminated in a sad and miserable manner.

The nerves of the voyagers were at highest tension, and Bulger remarked to Frank:

"It looks black for us, don't it? What shall we do?"

"Keep cool," adjured Frank; "when I give the word, fire! Make every shot count the best you know how!"

The crisis had come.

Over the rail upon the deck swarmed the Tartar soldiers. A tall barbarian with a long sword led them.

Frank threw all his strength into his lungs, as he shouted:

"Hold there! By what right do you attack us?"

The Tartar chieftain evidently did not understand English, for he waved his scimitar and retorted in a defiant and pompous way.

Frank again repeated his demand. This time the answer was of a different sort.

There was a sharp report and the woodwork of the window frame close by Frank's head was shattered.

This was enough for the young inventor.

He sprang up instantly and closed the steel shutter.

"Give it to the murderous dogs!" he cried. "Spare none!"

Barney and Pomp with loud cheers opened fire.

It was at close and deadly range. As fast as they could work the repeaters they did so.

The Tartars fell beneath such a fire and were for a time swept back over the rail.

"Keep it up!" shouted Frank. "Don't give them a chance to get aboard again!"

"Y' kin bet we will!" cried Pomp hilariously.

"Begorra, have at them!" cried Barney.

It was lively work for a time. But the Tartars, seeing that they could not carry the air-ship by open assault, retreated.

They fell behind the cover of an elevation near.

"Hurrah!" cried Bulger, "we have whipped them!"

"It is a point in our favor," said Frank cautiously, "though we haven't done with them yet."

"Don't you believe it?"

"You shall see!"

And at that moment Barney gave a sharp cry.

"Shure, Misher Frank, they are bound to beat us! It's all up with us now, for shure!"

"My soul!" exclaimed the young inventor. "We are doomed!"

There was good reason for this exclamation.

All beheld an astounding and demoralizing spectacle. From the fortifications near the mounted cannon had been rolled forth.

It was drawn up within range and trained upon the air-ship. It was a thrilling moment.

Never had defeat and death been nearer our voyagers than now. It seemed certain that they were to meet it this time.

The gun was trained, and a guard stood by it with lighted fuse. One shot from the cannon would be sufficient to ruin the air-ship.

Frank gave a groan.

"This is a sad ending of our plans!" he said, "yet, what more can we do?"

"Await our fate with fortitude," said Bulger, heroically.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE POWER OF A FIEND.

BUT the word was not given to fire.

The captain of the Tartar soldiers made a few flourishes with his sword and then walked boldly forward.

Frank saw that a truce was meant and accepted it. Certainly there was no hope left now but to temporize with the Tartars.

So he stepped out on the deck and said:

"Sprechen sie Deutsch?"

The Tartar looked puzzled.

"Parlez vous Francais?"

No intelligible sign.

"Haban y' Espanol?"

Again no reply.

"Professor!" cried Frank. "You know the Turkish language. Try that on him."

The professor had spent years in Arabia and Turkey while pursuing archaeological researches, and understood various Semitic tongues.

He stepped forward and addressed the fellow in plain Turkish. But though the Tartar captain looked more intelligent, yet he did not seem to understand.

But the professor varied the language with a number of dialects used by various tribes of Asia. As a result he hit upon the right one.

"I salute thee, Effenidii!" cried the Tartar captain, eagerly. "In the name of Mohammed, you must surrender to Beni Shirl, Captain of the Sheik's Guard and apostle of the Prophet!"

"Are those your terms, Beni Shirl?" asked the professor. "Why do you molest us?"

"Why do I molest thee, dogs of Christians?" cried the Tartar, angrily. "How canst thou ask that question when thou mayst see about thee the handiwork of thine, the noble followers of the Prophet thou hast done to death?"

"You forget that you opened the warfare, great captain," replied the professor, in a conciliatory way. "We but defended ourselves."

"Yet thou art dogs of Christians and invade the land of the Prophet!"

"Not until you fired upon us and brought us down out of the clouds!"

The expression of the Tartar's face changed.

"Thou hast the art of flying in the air," he said, "thou shalt teach it to Beni Shirl and he will give thee thy worthless lives!"

The professor interpreted this to Frank.

"Ask him what he proposes to do to us if we refuse," he said.

"We will hang the whole of ye," retorted the captain. "Refuse to surrender and our cannon shall blow you to pieces. Your airship is the property of Beni Shirl now!"

"What shall we do?" asked the professor of Frank, "is there no strategy which we can devise?"

"Leave him to me," said Frank, coolly, "I think I can fool him!"

Then he gave the professor directions for addressing the Tartar captain. The savant began in a circumspect way.

"The captain of the air-ship salutes you, Beni Shirl," he said, "he will treat with you upon certain considerations."

"I await them," said the captain of the guard, haughtily.

"First you shall spare our lives and set us safely outside your country."

"And for that?"

"He will turn the great air-ship over to you and teach you how to operate it."

"It is well," cried Beni Shirl, eagerly. "The bargain is done. Let me be shown the trick at once."

"Easy! Your cannon ball damaged the ship, so that it cannot descend without first making repairs."

"It is well. You shall have all time."

Beni Shirl spoke to a number of the soldiers, who advanced.

"What is this?" asked the professor.

"Only a matter of form, Effenidii," said the captain, suavely. "I shall be compelled to treat you as prisoners until after you have fulfilled your part of the bargain."

"Jupiter! he is a keen rascal," said Frank, with a smile. "Well, let him have his own way. We will make him dance a hornpipe yet."

"It is our only hope."

"Certainly! resistance would be the height of folly! Watch and wait!"

The armed guards were placed on the air-ship's deck and were stationed about it.

Then Frank began work on the disarranged cogs of the rotoscope. It was not a long task.

In a few hours he had all in good working order again.

His first hope had been to give the Tartars a surprise and suddenly send the air-ship up and leave them. But this was not feasible.

They had passed heavy ropes over the deck, evidently foreseeing this possibility.

But Frank was not baffled yet.

"I'll fix them!" he muttered.

Word was now sent to Beni Shirl that the air-ship was repaired and was at his disposal.

An immense throng of Tartar people were congregated about. The soldiers were drawn up in a deep square.

The captain of the guard came ostentatiously in response to the summons.

As he stepped aboard the air-ship he was accompanied by six brawny eunuchs all armed with keen edged scimitars.

"Treachery will mean death," he intimated grimly to Bulger.

The professor only bowed seriously.

Then he and Frank took the captain in charge, and began to show him over the air ship.

The six big eunuchs kept close behind their master. But Frank only smiled grimly.

The young inventor pretended to describe to the captain all the mechanism of the ship.

The professor acted as interpreter.

But the captain of the Tartars found the electric problem something deeper than anything he had ever attempted to fathom.

He was befogged.

There was nothing like it in the Koran or in the writings of his fathers. This mysterious unseen element must be linked with the devil.

And for a moment his superstitious fears asserted themselves.

But he overcame his religious scruples in his anxiety to become master of the air ship. So he demanded that he should be shown how to make the air ship rise.

Frank took him to the key board.

"Press that," he said, putting his hand on the lever.

The captain did so.

The machinery buzzed. Sparks leaped from the dynamos. But the ship did not rise.

An angry gleam shone in the captain's eyes. He gave a guttural exclamation. Instantly the six eunuchs brandished their scimitars.

"Make the ship rise or you die!" hissed Beni Shirl, "there shall be no treachery here!"

"You forget, noble sir," said Bulger, obsequiously, "the ropes you ordered placed across her deck act as an anchor."

The captain's face changed. He looked a bit crestfallen.

"Enough!" he cried to one of the eunuchs, "remove the ropes!"

The order was instantly obeyed.

The ropes were removed.

Frank drew a deep breath.

He knew that the critical moment had come. He leaned forward and placed the captain's hand upon the electric lever.

Instantly the ship began gently to rise.

Up she went gracefully and with a thrilling motion. For a moment Beni Shire forgot himself in his delight and excitement.

Up for a thousand feet went the air-ship.

Frank all the while was endeavoring to explain the mechanism to the Tartar chief.

But Beni Shirl only comprehended part. He rushed out upon deck and took a look at the earth.

In the knowledge of his mastery at that moment he grew inflated and began to give grandiloquent orders.

One of these was that the eunuchs should throw one of the menial soldiers over the rail. The tyrannical and despotic Tartar captain with true Nero-like spirit wanted to see the effect of his journey to the earth.

The order was obeyed.

The poor wretch, screaming and struggling, was carried to the rail.

"My soul! that is awful!" gasped Frank. "What an inhuman monster."

"He is a fiend!" cried Bulger.

But no help could be accorded the unfortunate wretch. Over the rail he was launched and down he went to a frightful death.

Complacently the monster watched his subject vanish in space. Then he gave a guttural command for the air-ship to be put to her speed.

This was done.

The ship was made to go around in a wide circle. Then, fully satisfied of his supremacy over the air-ship and her crew he walked profoundly up to Bulger, and announced:

"I have changed my mind, sire. You are too valuable subjects to depart from my country. You are made subjects of mine and I will reward you well for faithful service. But if you deceive me—" a frightful grin—"I will make you wish you had never had a mother!"

Bulger conveyed this information to Frank. The young inventor said:

"We will tame the Tartar. There is no better time to act than now!"

CHAPTER X.

ACROSS THE URAL.

THE very moment that the air-ship left the earth and got out of range of the cannon, Frank knew that he had the game in his own hands.

His plan to oust the Tartars was a very simple one.

The decks of the air-ship were of steel. They were equipped with a device which Frank had conceived with the very idea in view of an invasion on her decks by a foe.

He could have employed the device before, while the air-ship was on the earth.

But she was while there under the muzzle of the deadly cannon. Now there was no bar to its use.

He, therefore, wasted no time in making use of it.

Wherever he went two of the armed eunuchs accompanied him. This was a warning against treachery.

But Frank only smiled at this. At a convenient moment he gave a private signal to the others. Instantly action was made.

Barney and Pomp were at the wheel. They instantly stepped upon a little dais which rested upon glass legs.

Bulger by the rail did the same. Frank at the keyboard also stepped upon a glass platform.

Then he instantly switched the full force of the dynamo current into the steel deck of the air-ship.

Simultaneously the Tartars all gave a leap in the air and fell senseless.

Frank switched the current off.

At his feet lay the two eunuchs who had followed him with their drawn scimitars.

All had been done in the twinkling of an eye. There was not time for even an outcry.

The entire murderous gang were hors du combat, and wholly at the mercy of their erstwhile prisoners.

Beni Shirl lay by the pilot house door in a senseless heap. It was safe to say that none of them knew what had struck them.

"Whurroo!" cried Barney, leaping down from his perch. "That's the way to fool 'em! Shure, they're not in it now at all, at all!"

"Golly, dey jes' guv up de ghostis like little lambs," chimed in Pomp. "Suah dey amn't so ferocious as dey was!"

As for Frank and Bulger, they were much gratified. But the question now arose as to what it was best to do with the senseless Tartars.

None of them were dead. At any moment they might come out of the spell upon them.

Frank hit upon an idea.

"Bind each one securely," he said; "I'll see that they do not trouble us again!"

"A deserving fate would be to throw them overboard," said Bulger.

"Right," agreed Frank, "and yet I hardly care to do that. I do not wish to needlessly take life, even of murderers."

Barney and Pomp bound the Tartars securely.

Then they were placed in a row by the rail. The air-ship once more headed to the westward.

The little Tartar town over which Beni Shirl had been the despot was left far behind.

They now began to approach the mighty Altoi Range of mountains. The country became less densely settled.

Steadily onward the air-ship sailed until it hovered over a mighty wild gorge.

Here Frank caused it to be brought to a halt.

"Do you see that shelf of rock down below there, jutting out from the mountain wall," he said, "there is where we will leave our birds."

The air-ship settled down and rested upon the small surface of rock.

The Tartars were lifted one by one from the deck of the air-ship. They were placed upon the rock and their bonds cut.

"They will come to presently," said Frank; "then they will have a nice little journey back to their homes."

"Which serves them right."

"I think so."

Indeed, at that moment one of the gang began to show signs of returning consciousness.

It was Beni Shirl himself, and he suddenly roused and lifted himself upon his elbow glaring about.

He began to curse roundly in the Mohammedan tongue.

"Take care," cried Bulger, in the Tartar tongue. "You are fortunate to escape with your life!"

"The plague on you!" hissed the scoundrel. "What has happened? Where are we? Ho, there, eunuchs!"

The voyagers laughed tantalizingly, and stepped aboard the air-ship. It began to ascend.

Vainly the captain of the Tartar guard raved and stormed. The air ship sailed away and left the barbarians on the spot.

It was certainly a fortunate escape from what had seemed certain to be a terrible death.

"One thing sure," said Frank, with a shrug of his shoulders, "we will keep an eye out upon these fortified towns over which we pass."

"That is the best way to do," said Bulger. "We cannot afford to take too many chances!"

Over the Altoi Mountains the air-ship sailed into the land of the Kurds.

Once this mountain range was passed it seemed as if Europe had already hove into view.

The Province of Tomsk was beneath them, and beyond this would come the wonderful valleys of the Irtish river and then the Ural Mountains, the real boundary line between Europe and Asia.

"By next week we shall be in Russia!" declared Frank.

"Barring accidents," suggested Bulger.

"Certainly!"

Siberia, the land of the exile and of interminable winters, lay far to the northward.

The days passed without special incident, for no descent was made.

The air-ship passed over many villages of the Krichiz Tartars, over many wild fastnesses, some of them unexplored by man.

At last, one bright morning a distant mighty range of mountains was sighted in the west.

"The Ural at last!" cried Bulger, wildly. "Hurrah! We are bound to win success!"

"Europe!" said Frank, with a thrill. "Indeed we are half our journey over."

There was a general jollification over the fact. Then the air-ship swung high over the mighty Ural Range.

Night came on dark and cloudy. It was evident that a storm was rapidly brewing.

Frank remembered his last experience and said:

"Keep your eye open while on watch to-night, Barney. If it looks like a bad storm, be sure and call me up."

"All right, sir!" agreed the Celt.

A little past midnight the wind did blow so stiffly that Barney found it impossible to keep the Cloud-Cutter head on to the gale.

So he did not hesitate to at once call Frank, who responded quickly. Windows and doors were closed, the electric heating apparatus was turned on, and the air-ship made its ascent into upper regions.

Far above the storm it hung until daylight. The next day at sunrise the Cloud-Cutter passed from Asia into Europe.

The whole Russian Empire lay beneath the aerial voyagers.

The change in the country was intense. Neither the topography nor the character of the country was the same.

Quaint, thrifty little villages, with their curious inns took the place of the wild mountain camps and dens of the Asiatic people.

"Let me see," said Bulger; "have you figured out, Frank, through what important Russian cities we shall pass?"

"None until you get beyond the Volga," said Frank, "then we shall pass in turn, Saratof, Koursk, Tcheringeff, Pinsk and Warsaw. That will bring us to the German boundary."

"Warsaw," exclaimed Bulger, "that is the city over which I have a desire to pass. It is the old time capital of Poland."

"Before Poland became merged into Russia—yes," replied Frank, "we will pass directly over that city."

The air-ship, as the voyagers could see, created no little sensation among the country people below.

Whole towns could be seen in a state of wildest uproar. What the thoughts of these people must have been it is not easy to guess.

Frank had no intention of descending, but when near the city of Saratof, he saw a great stir below.

There were heavy fortifications upon a hill here. The Russian soldiers thronged the ramparts.

Suddenly as the voyagers watched them, a great cry went up from Prof. Bulger.

"On my word, Frank!" he cried, "they have a balloon!"

"A balloon?"

This was seen to be a fact. It is a well known fact that in Russia the war balloon is a thing of practical use and value.

The Russians have mastered the art of sailing and steering the war balloon, though the art is kept a profound secret.

That the Russian commandant meant to send a message up to the air-ship was evident.

Frank was complacent.

"Let them try it," he said. "I am safe. We are Americans under the starry flag, and under the protection of the law of nations."

"Then you think they will not harm us?" asked the professor.

"They will never dare do that, rest assured. Let them come."

"At any rate," said the professor, "we can sail off and leave them."

"Begorra, that's roight!" cried Barney.

"I jes' reckon dat de air-ship kin beat dat balloon," said Pomp. "I bet my money on it!"

"I don't intend to run away from them," said Frank. "They will trouble us at their peril!"

The Russian balloon had been quickly inflated. It now shot up into the air like a rocket.

The voyagers on the deck of the air-ship watched it with great interest.

They were not at all sure of the outcome.

CHAPTER XI.

PRISONERS IN RUSSIA.

THE Russian balloon carried a huge basket and was of enormous capacity.

There were five armed men in the cage, and they were steering the balloon toward the air-ship.

They wore the uniform of the Russian infantry. One of them made signals to the air-ship.

Frank could easily have sailed away from them and left them in the lurch.

But he did not do so.

The truth was, he had no fear of results, and some curiosity as to what the Russians would do.

So he held the air-ship steady and answered the signals.

The balloon rapidly drew nearer to the air-ship. Then one of the Russians shouted in French:

"Ah, messieurs, where do you fly? What sort of an air-ship is that?"

"We are Americans," replied Frank. "We are on our way around the world and encroach on nobody's territory."

"Ah, Americaines, eh?" exclaimed the interlocutor. "You ask us to believe much. Say now that you are Germans or French bound upon a trip of exploring and spying over the Czar's dominions."

"I will say nothing of the kind," retorted Frank.

"You deny it?"

"I do."

"Ah, we doubt you. Under the circumstances you will descend and allow us to board your ship!"

"Never!" replied Frank, sternly.

"You refuse?"

"I do!"

"Ah, but the Czar's orders—"

"Hang you and your Czar. If you were not a blockhead you would see the American flag floating at the stern of this ship."

The Russian officer was singularly obdurate.

"Ah, but anybody can fly the American flag," he said, suspiciously, "that does not make them Americans."

"You doubt us?"

"I do, monsieur. We must call upon you in the name of the Czar to descend and submit to an inspection."

Frank laughed scornfully.

"Do you think you can compel me to do that?" he said. "Why I can run away from you with the greatest of ease. You are helpless."

"Perhaps we are," said the Russian officer, grimly, "but we are under orders and must fire upon you unless you obey."

"Fire upon this flag at your peril," replied Frank, warningly.

Then he ceased speaking.

For some inexplicable reason the air-ship began to sink. Down it went rapidly below the level of the balloon.

And at the same moment Barney ran out of the cabin, crying:

"Shure, Misther Frank, the machinery is out av order agin!"

"The machinery out of order!" exclaimed Frank, with amazement; "shut off the dynamos then, Barney! Let it fall easy."

"All roight, sor."

"What is this?" cried the professor, in dismay.

"We have got to fall into the hands of the Russians after all," said Frank, with a smile.

"You don't seem to dread it much," said the professor.

"The case is very different now," said Frank, with logic. "We are in a civilized country, and not among barbarians. These Russians are bound to respect the law of nations. They will make us a little trouble, but they will be compelled to let us alone."

The balloonists evidently thought that the master of the air ship had concluded to comply with their demands and descend.

They accordingly began to lower the balloon.

A guard of Cossacks was seen far below, waiting the descent of the Cloud Cutter.

Frank went below and examined the machinery.

One of the small electric coils had given out. It would have required scarcely an hour's work to repair it, but it would be necessary to descend to do it.

However, Frank did not feel at all doubtful as to the result. He knew that he was safe.

Instantly, as the ship touched the earth, armed Cossacks laid hold of the rail. Heavy ropes were passed across the deck to hold the ship down.

It was somewhat before an officer appeared upon the scene.

Then military guard was established upon the air-ship's deck. A tall, fierce-looking Russian, with a staff of officers, rode down pompously to the spot.

He leaped from the saddle and upon the air-ship's deck. Frank met him coolly.

The Russian saluted and Frank returned it stiffly.

"Well, monsieur," said the Russian officer, jauntily. "Your little game does not work. You are ours, and your clever flying machine as well. It is well that you surrendered."

"Indeed," replied Frank, coolly. "We did not descend, Monsieur, in response to your summons."

The lieutenant looked astonished.

"You did not?" he exclaimed.

"Non, Monsieur."

"Lieutenant, sir, if you please," said the Russian with dignity.

"Very well, Monsieur Lieutenant," said Frank, with aggravating calmness. The Russian was nettled.

"Do you mean to say that you have not surrendered?" he asked.

"Why should I surrender?" asked Frank, sharply. "What do you take me for?"

"A German dog spying upon our fortifications," retorted the lieutenant; "the Czar shall set upon your case!"

"Hang you and your Czar—I am an American!"

"An American?"

"Certainly; do you not know our flag?"

The lieutenant looked steadily and dubiously at Frank. It was evident that he disbelieved him.

"Your defense is quite clever, monsieur," he said. "Mayhap you are not German but French."

"You are mistaken."

"But why should the military service of America send you over here? What reason have they for spying upon us?"

The lieutenant asked this question as if he believed that it could not possibly be answered.

But it was not such a poser as that. Frank replied quietly:

"You are under a fog, sir, in regard to this matter. This air-ship is not in any military service nor does it belong to any government."

"W—what?" exclaimed the Russian; "to whom does it belong then?"

"To me, sir!"

"To you, a private man? Zounds, sir! I will never believe that. And who are you? An American prince?"

"Princes are unknown in my country," said Frank, coolly, "that is where you err. A private citizen in America may own an air-ship without fear of its being confiscated by the government."

The lieutenant drummed upon his sword hilt, reflectively.

"My name is Carlos Prevoski," he said, "and yours—?"

"Frank Reade, Jr."

"You have passports?"

"No."

Then the lieutenant gave an impatient exclamation.

"How can you expect to escape being detained under suspicion?" he said sharply. "You have no passports and nothing to approve your identity. You are under arrest!"

Frank saw that it was useless to argue with the fellow.

"There is an American consul at Saratof," he said. "Will you send a message to him? He will prove my identity and satisfy your government that we are not spies or suspicious characters."

Prevoski hesitated. But he could not refuse so reasonable a request. So he said somewhat ungraciously:

"Very well, monsieur, you shall have the chance to prove your identity—I will send the messenger. It may require a day or two to get an answer."

"That will suffice. I am under your protection until then."

"You are under arrest."

"As you please."

Prevoski saluted and returned to his horse. He galloped away with his brother officers.

Then the Cossacks redoubled their line of guards about the air-ship.

"Well," said the professor, "this is amazing to say the least. Can you not reason with that fool?"

"No," replied Frank; "we are booked for a day's stay here."

"Perhaps longer."

"No—not if we get a prompt answer from the consul at Saratof. He will of course clear us. We can then go on again."

"But it makes it awkward to say the least," growled Bulger. "We ought to be on our way to Warsaw now."

"We will reach Warsaw in due season," said Frank. "Have no fears on that score, my dear professor."

It was dreary work waiting for the return of the messenger from Saratof.

The hours seemed years, but twenty-four of them finally slipped by. Then a mounted guard rode down to the air-ship.

Foremost was Prevoski, who had a written message in his hand, and who had a light of exultation upon his bronzed face.

"I have the reply, monsieur," he said, with mock politeness.

"Well," said Frank, with impatience, "of course you know that we all right."

The lieutenant shook his head slowly, and with a derisive smile.

"The American Consul at Saratof," he said, "does not know of any Frank Reade, Jr., or any American air-ship. He is unaware of this."

"The blockhead!" cried Frank, angrily, "he does not read any American papers. Confound his insolence! Why don't he give us our voucher? He knows we are all right."

The lieutenant shook his head slowly.

"It may be all right, monsieur," he said, "but our suspicion—ah, you must await the order of the Czar!"

Frank's face fell, and Bulger gave a low whistle of dismay.

"On my word!" he said, lugubriously, "there is not a particle of doubt in it. We are stuck!"

CHAPTER XII.

HOMEWARD BOUND—THE END.

FRANK was exceedingly angry.

"Confound these blockheads of Russians!" he muttered, "they cannot see through glass. It is strange that he does not see at once that we are Americans and all right."

But the Russian lieutenant did not see this.

He had his obstinate ideas of duty and clung to them. He would await the orders of the Czar.

This would be, no doubt, incarceration in prison, and perhaps execution; worse than all, Siberia.

It was of no use to argue with Prevoski.

He intimated that his orders were strict, and disobedience would cost him his head.

"The Czar is merciless!" he said, with a shrug of his shoulders.

This was the unfortunate state of affairs when a lucky incident dispelled all trouble.

A party of horsemen came dashing down the steep into the place. A glance was enough for our friends to see that one of them was an American.

"Our consul!" exclaimed Frank. "We are saved!"

This proved to be the truth. The Saratof Consul, whose name was Wilkins, had come in person to identify the prisoners as Americans.

This was quickly done and the Russian commander made profuse apologies which terminated the episode.

The breakage in the air-ship's machinery was repaired and she once more went on her way.

All in the party were glad when the boundary line into Germany was crossed.

Warsaw was viewed from a convenient height and Professor Bulger was made happy.

A most interesting part of the tour now begun though it was necessarily devoid of incident.

The great cities and towns, the picturesque valleys and great rivers of Germany were all passed over in wonderful panorama. It was a scene to be long remembered.

Next came Belgium, and the air ship for a time hovered over the beautiful city of Brussels.

Then the flight across the channel was begun.

It was a beautiful warm July morning, when the Cloud Cutter sailed over the mouth of the Thames, with all its shipping and its muddy water.

Bonny England, with its great mass of humanity, lay beneath, and the professor exclaimed:

"We have met in no country such thick settlement. Every inch of English soil seems to be occupied."

Frank laughed.

"When I was at school," he said, "I used to wonder how long it would be before the English people would find their little island so small, that they would be crowded in thousands from it into the sea."

"Indeed I do not wonder when its limited area is considered. Yet the island has had a population for thousands of years, which despite its increase has never yet sufficed to over-run its area. Nor do I believe that it ever will."

This question settled, Frank and the professor turned their attention to their charts.

A very interesting event was close at hand.

Greenwich, the astronomical center upon the line of which the great meridian is laid, was near at hand.

Though the hour was early, the voyagers felt sure that there should be some learned savant in the great observatory who would salute them.

So the air-ship bore down for the quaint building from which so much learned star-gazing has been done in the past.

As they drew near a man in a long cloak was seen upon the staging of the big dome from whence the immense great telescope was sighted. He was apparently watching the air-ship in a state of astonishment.

"There is our chance!" cried the professor. "Give him the hail!"

"Ay, ay!" said Frank, "when we get close enough."

Then directly over the great observatory Frank leaned over the rail and shouted:

"Ahoy, my friend!"

The savant made a gesture with his hand, and then shouted:

"Are you from Mars or the moon? Certainly the art of sailing in the air is not known on earth."

"You are mistaken," replied Frank. "This is the new air-ship, the Electric Cloud Cutter, and I am its owner, Frank Reade, Jr., of Readestown, U. S. A."

"From America?" gasped the savant.

"Yes."

"Where in the name of Tophet are you going?"

"We are following the line of the great meridian around the earth. This is our professor—Bulger of the American Astronomical Society."

The professor waved a salute, which was answered by the Englishman.

"I am Kent Oldworthy, F. R. S. A. B., and so forth. This is England's astronomical center. Won't you descend and stop with us awhile?"

"It would be most interesting, my esteemed contemporary," replied Bulger, courteously, "but the truth is we are very anxious to avoid a delay in the completion of our journey. I shall give a written account of our experiences in our Scientific Review, and will send you a copy."

"Thank you much!" replied Professor Oldworthy, "we regret that we cannot have the honor of a visit. Ah, you Americans, wonderful people that you are, never have time for anything."

"We wish you adieu!"

"Adieu and bon voyage!"

Greenwich was passed thus, and a day later the air-ship crossed St. George's Channel to Ireland.

Leaving Wexford to the south, the Cloud-Cutter sailed on over Limerick to the north of the Shannon.

The voyagers would much have liked to stop in the beautiful green isle and explore many of its historic old castles.

But this could not be done, for Frank said:

"I have serious doubts as to whether the machinery will hold out for us to cross the North Atlantic. Every time it is stopped and started the extra friction injures it. And we should be desirous above all other things to exactly complete our circuit of the globe."

"By all means," cried the professor, "let nothing stand in the way of that."

So Barney was unable to gratify the wish of his life to set foot once more on the soil of his ancestors.

"Oh, bad cess to the bloody Britishers," he cried, "shure Ireland wud be the foineast countrhy in the worruld to-day but fer them. Ar-rah, an' I cud show yez the ruins av the castle av the O'Sheas who were princes and jookes in the days av Brian Boru."

The Cloud Cutter left the Irish coast far behind and stretched away across the stormy North Atlantic.

It was expected to strike the coast of Labrador near what was known as Sandwich Bay.

Thence across the wild country to James Bay and the great circuit would be made.

Realizing that they were now on the homestretch, the nerves of all grew taut and strained.

Frank gave the closest attention to the machinery. No chances could be taken.

They were a little north of the usual line of the Atlantic steamers, but yet in case of disaster it was possible that they might be called upon for aid or rescue.

This was always the stormiest part of the Atlantic, but very fortunately they encountered smooth weather all the way.

For days they hovered over the rolling dark waters of the North Atlantic.

The gray skies of those latitudes hung over them like a pall. But at last land was sighted.

It was a cold, inhospitable looking coast, just such as one might expect in Labrador.

But it was the coast of America, and meant that they were upon native soil once more.

When the Cloud-Cutter glided over the gray cliffs and entered upon its reach across the densely wooded wilds, the voyagers gave one prolonged cheer.

"Hurrah, hurrah!" cried Prof. Bulger, quite beside himself. "We have done it! I tell you we have done it! Around the world on the Great Meridian! Hurrah!"

It was, indeed, afeat well worth feeling proud of.

It was a fearful desolate and lonely tract of country now to the shores of James Bay.

Only a few colonies of Laps were seen, the natives of the region. Game of every description was abundant.

Reindeer and moose browsed in the valleys, bear and wildcats lurked in the mountains.

But still the Cloud Cutter kept on her way to the end of her journey. It was near evening, when Pomp, who was on lookout, sighted the waters of James Bay.

"Golly, Marse Frank," he yelled, "we've got dar! Cum along quick, everybody! We've got back to de berry place we started from!"

Frank hastily took a few observations and made some computations.

"We have not deviated ten miles at any point from the Meridian line in our course around the world!" he declared. "And we have completed our journey in the remarkable time of sixty-two days, nine hours and fourteen minutes to a dot. This is the quickest trip ever made around the earth."

The great journey was ended. The party had reached the starting point after making the complete circuit of the earth.

Frank Reade, Jr.'s great object of tracing the Meridian line was safely and successfully accomplished.

This done, the next thing in order was to return home.

While this embraced quite a long sail to the south, yet it seemed child's play compared with the gigantic feat of sailing twenty-five thousand miles in a little less than sixty-three days.

However, the Cloud-Cutter was headed southward, and the last incident in the great journey was enacted.

Over the immense forests of Upper Canada the Cloud Cutter sailed, while the professor indulged in predictions for the future.

"This will yet be one of the most wonderful regions of the earth," he declared, confidently.

"I agree with you," said Frank, "it is marvelously rich in timber, in furs and in valuable ores."

"I don't doubt but that there are gold and silver mines in these wilds, more extensive than any ever yet discovered," declared the professor.

"Just so. But the long winters will preclude mining to any great extent for some time yet."

"Only until such time as transportation in and out of the region can be established."

"That is true."

"When that time comes there will be a rush for this new El Dorado which will exceed that to California in 'forty-nine."

The air-ship sailed slowly but steadily on. Frank now felt confident that her engines would last until they should get home.

Every day now they rapidly approached the American border.

Down the course of the St. Lawrence the air-ship kept on its way until it hung over the ancient and historic City of Quebec.

A soldier on the citadel fired his musket as the air-ship went over.

Barney and Pomp returned the salute with rifles and dipped the American colors.

A little over the two hundred miles more brought them to the American line.

As they crossed it and knew that they were in the United States at last all felt very exuberant.

"Golly! Ise jes' glad fo' to git back to Readestown," cried Pomp, as he stood on his head for a change."

"Begorra, there's no place loike home afther all," averred Barney, as he gave the darky a punch which sent him over like a top.

"Hi—hi! yo' mos' nigh killed dis chile," spluttered the darky. "I hab yo' skin fo' dat!"

And away he went after the Celt helter skelter.

Now did either of them desist until they had indulged in a tremendous old time scuffle.

Readestown at last.

The reception accorded the returned voyagers was of course very elaborate.

The newspapers of the country teemed with the exploit.

Prof. Bulger went back to Washington, where he became the envied of all his colleagues.

The air-ship could never go another cruise, but Frank only laughed and said:

"I have another scheme in hand which will beat this exploit out of sight. Just wait awhile."

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